

16 Techniques for Ego-Transcendence

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The first duty of every soul is to release the hold ego-consciousness has upon it. All other spiritual practices are subservient to this one supreme obligation. I address ego-transcendence, therefore, as the first, and indeed the only, challenge on the spiritual path.

Here are a few techniques that will help you in your supremely important efforts to transcend ego-consciousness:

1. When people praise you for any reason, don't accept their praise in your heart. Thank them sincerely, but then give the credit to God. Do so in words if you like, but much more importantly, give Him the credit in your heart. Tell yourself, "God is the Doer."
2. When someone else gets the credit for something you've done, don't look for a way of letting people know where the credit really belongs. It would be natural enough for you to do that; you needn't even consider it a fault. Still, don't make too much of it. You will find much greater freedom in your heart if you mentally give all the credit to God.
3. If someone scolds you for something you didn't do, you may see some good reason for letting him know that you're not guilty. If it doesn't really matter who did it, however, you will gain more, spiritually, if you say nothing.
4. If you see others eager to air their views, be generous to them: let them speak. Add thoughts of your own only if you see that those others might be interested in what you have to say.
5. Don't try constantly to explain or define for others' gratification who and what you are. Let your actions, and your inner reality, speak for you.
6. Never place yourself mentally in competition with others.
7. Never try, without some good and definite reason, to justify your actions, ideas, or accomplishments. Whatever you've done, give it mentally to God.
8. Stand up for what you feel is right, but try to make it clear always that you are not trying to impose on anyone values that are merely personal. Base your values on abstract principles.
9. Try not to tell stories of which the main point is to make you look good.
10. It is not humility to tell yourself, 'I can't....' Remember, God can do anything. If you give Him the chance, moreover, He can do anything through you. Ask Him for the inspiration, the guidance, and the strength to do whatever you must do. As Yogananda put it, 'Pray in this way: I will reason; I will will; I will act—but guide Thou my reason, will, and activity in everything I do.'
11. Make it a point not to feel badly when you make a mistake. Obviously, it would compound the mistake if you insisted you didn't make it. When you do err, however, acknowledge the error calmly and cheerfully—if not openly before others, then at least inwardly to yourself. The Master used to say, 'Don't tell your faults to others, unless they have spiritual wisdom, lest they hoard up that memory and use it against you sometime out of displeasure with you.'
12. If possible, don't even say to yourself, "I made this mistake." Say, rather, "The mistake got made." God is the Doer. Give to Him the blame as well as the credit for everything. Then try ever more earnestly to attune your every thought and action to His will.
13. Avoid calling attention to your own cleverness or skill—for instance, by making the kind of bright remark that is almost always followed by a smirk and a glance around the room for others' approval.
14. Overcome the natural need for self-importance by enjoying your own unimportance!
15. Years ago, I was invited to speak at a conference on communities. Several famous persons had been invited to speak. The convener had set up the conference to announce his plans for starting a community himself. I was, as it happened, the only person there who'd had actual experience in founding communities. One evening during the week I invited several of the speakers out to dinner at a restaurant. For some reason, though we sat around the same table, they basically ignored me and spent the evening talking self-importantly to one another. The situation was especially unusual in that I was the host! This is beautiful! I told myself. No one seemed interested in my opinions on anything. Therefore, while trying to be gracious, I said very little. At first I was surprised to find how far I was in their minds from "center stage"; I played the part of an otherwise non-existent audience. I soon realized, however, that this was a golden opportunity to practice enjoying my own unimportance. I found the evening delightful, and relished the inner freedom I felt in that thought.
16. Every evening, as you review in your mind the events of the day, avoid the thought of how you "stood up" in others' eyes: what kind of impression you made; the words you said; how you reacted; how others reacted to you. Instead, share with God any thoughts of this nature that come to you. Don't let your mind play with the thought of where and how you yourself fit into any picture. Don't toy with flattery by entertaining it even lightly in your mind. Reject sternly any thought of self-importance, self-praise, self-justification, and blame. This subject is as important for you as your own salvation, for your spiritual liberation depends upon release from ego-consciousness.

If release from the prison of delusion is important to you, then everything I have written above is of supreme importance. It is a question of the direction you give your energy and consciousness.

If you allow yourself to be affected, even minutely, by flattery, to that extent you will be affixing one more iron bar in the prison of your ego. And to the extent that you allow yourself to accept in your ego even the slightest energy, to that exact extent you will create more bondage for yourself.

Instead, therefore, seek in every way possible to expand your energy and consciousness away from yourself. Be quite stern with yourself in this practice, no matter how carefree you may seem in others' eyes.